DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 340 087 EA 022 629

AUTHOR Slater, Jana Kay
TITLE Middle Grades Reform in California: Auspicious Beginnings and High Expectations. Executive Summary and Recommendations: Interim Evaluation.
INSTITUTION California State Dept. of Education, Sacramento.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 17p.; For related documents, see EA 022 630-631.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Cooperative Planning; Cooperative Programs; *Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; Networks; School Restructuring
IDENTIFIERS *California

ABSTRACT

The California agenda for middle-grade reform is based on 10 regional networks, each composed of 1 foundation school and approximately 10 partnership schools. An interim evaluation of the reform effort, which occurred from 1988-90, is presented in this executive summary of two annual reports, "Technical Report 1" and "Technical Report 2." "Technical Report 1: Current and Expected Attainment of Recommendations in Caught in the Middle" presents information on the first year of reform implementation, current and expected progress of the 115 participating schools, and characteristics of participating students and teachers. "Technical Report 2: Regional Processes" provides regional information on the first 2 years of implementation, focusing on leadership structures and accomplishments. Each report includes an evaluation design, overall conclusions, major findings, and recommendations. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Middle Grades Reform in California

Auspicious Beginnings and High Expectations

Executive Summary and Recommendations: Interim Evaluation

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

T. Smith

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
SACRAMENTO, 1990

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Middle Grades Reform in California

Auspicious Beginnings and High Expectations

Executive Summary and Recommendations: Interim Evaluation

Prepared by
Jana Kay Slater
Special Studies and Evaluation Reports Unit
Program Evaluation and Research Division

Publishing Information

This report was prepared by Jana Kay Slater, Consultant, Special Studies and Evaluation Reports Unit, Program Evaluation and Research Division, California Department of Education. It was published by the Department, 721 Capitol Mall, Sacramento, California (mailing address: P.O. Box 944272, Sacramento, CA 94244-2720). Any questions regarding the report should be directed to Jana Kay Slater, telephone (916) 323-6376.

The report was distributed under the provisions of the Library Distribution Act and *Government Code* Section 11096.

1990

CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	v
INTRODUCTION	1
EVALUATION DESIGN	2
OVERALL CONCLUSIONS	2
Technical Report 1	2
Technical Report 2	3
TECHNICAL REPORT 1: MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	4
Participants	4
Areas of Reform	5
Recommendations for schools	6
TECHNICAL REPORT 2: MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	8
Leadership Structures	8
Regional Accomplishments	9
Recommendations for Regions	10

PREFACE

The California agenda for reform in the middle grades is based on a networking model suggested in a 1987 report of the California Middle Grade Task Force titled Caught in the Middle: Educational Reform for Young Adolescents in California Public Schools. Accordingly, in 1988 ten regional networks were designated across the state, each composed of one foundation school and approximately ten partnership schools. Reforms recommended in Caught in the Middle were to be implemented at the school sites. The regional networks, under the leadership of the foundation school, were to provide participating schools with assistance and support needed for success in the reform effort.

An interim evaluation of the California agenda for middle grade reform took place from 1988 to 1990 and is presented in two annual reports, Technical Report 1 and Technical Report 2. Technical Report 1: Current and Expected Attainment of Recommendations in Caught in the Middle presented information on (1) the first year (1988-89) of implementation of the reform agenda; and (2) the current and expected progress of the 115 schools involved in the regional networks in carrying out the reforms recommended in Caught in the Middle. The report also described the implementation of the reform agenda and the characteristics of students and teachers in the foundation and partnership schools.

Technical Report 2: Regional Processes presented region-level information about the first two years (1988-89 and 1989-90) of the implementation of the reform agenda. The report focused on the leadership structures adopted by regions to implement their middle grade reform objectives and on their subsequent accomplishments. Leadership structure was defined and described as leadership provided by individuals and committees. Regional accomplishments centered on staff development, communication, and formation of linkages with colleges and other community agencies.

The purpose of the interim evaluation was to provide ongoing feedback and recommendations to help modify and guide the efforts of schools and regions in more successful directions during the course of the three-year project. The technical reports were intended for readers working directly with regional network participants. This Executive Summary provides a synopsis for readers interested in but not directly involved with the project. It presents the overall conclusions, major findings, and recommendations presented in technical reports 1 and 2. For those wishing more detail about the results of the interim evaluation, copies of technical reports 1 and 2 are available on request from the Office of Middle Grades Support Services, P.O. Box 944272, Sacramento, CA 94244-2720.

THADDEUS DUMAS
Manager
Office of Middle Grades Support Services
(916) 322-9727

INTRODUCTION

Impetus for a statewide reform agenda in the middle grades in California stemmed from the 1987 report of the California Middle Grade Task Force titled Caught in the Middle: Educational Reform for Young Adolescents in California Public Schools (Sacramento: California Department of Education). That report represents the efforts of 36 task force members and eight other persons throughout the state who served on six regional advisory panels. It contains 102 recommendations for improving middle grade education and proposes an agenda based on the premise that optimal reform will result from partnerships among schools, each school learning from and helping another. Further, the agenda strongly supports the concept of local control; that is, schools within a partnership are in the best position to diagnose their own weaknesses and propose needed strategies for reform.

In 1988 the California Department of Education implemented the agenda by designating ten regional networks, each composed of one foundation school and approximately ten partnership schools. All schools in each regional network were considered partners dedicated to achieving state-of-the-art education in middle grades. Each partnership school was given charge of implementing site-specific reform efforts for its students in the middle grades. Each foundation school, selected by the Department for its potential to model excellence and facilitate the reform efforts of partnership schools in its regional network, was to assist schools in its region.

Each region received funding from private foundations (the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the W.K. Kellogg foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan) to distribute among its schools ($35,500 in 1988-89; $41,600 in 1989-90). Supplemental funding for one statewide conference and one follow-up conference in each of the regions was provided by The Edna McConnell Clark foundation of New York. Regional networks became functional during the 1988-89 school year and will continue to operate during the 1990-91 school year.

EVALUATION DESIGN

In an effort to collect information about the process and outcomes of the reform efforts of schools and regions, several data collection methods were used: (1) archival analysis; (2) structured interviews with key personnel in all ten regions; (3) a mailed survey (completed by 108 of the 115 participating schools); and (4) direct observation of statewide and regional meetings and conferences. The strategy incorporated triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative information to address the limitations of any single method. Quantitative measures were used to measure anticipated outcomes. Qualitative methods were used to provide (1) contextual information related to anticipated outcomes; (2) information about implementation and change processes; and (3) an opportunity to observe unanticipated outcomes.

During the first year (1988-89) of the interim evaluation, data were collected about school-level implementation of reform objectives and can be found in Technical Report 1. During the second and third years (1988-89; 1989-90), data were collected about region-level facilitation of the reform efforts of the schools in each region and can be found in Technical Report 2. A detailed description of the evaluation design and methodology is located in Appendix B of Technical Report 1.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Technical Report 1

School-level reform activities, six months into the project

- Reform in all areas of middle grade education in California was well under way six months into the project and was expected to continue at a vigorous rate. Most of the recommendations in Caught in the Middle were being implemented or were expected to be implemented in the near future by some or all of the participating schools.

- Nearly all schools had recently revised their core curriculum to align with the model curriculum guides, and most subjects were reportedly in fairly good alignment. However, there was still work to be done in history-social science and the visual and performing arts.

- The creation and expansion of interdisciplinary teams (two or more teachers with differing subject-area specializations sharing the same students) had been and was expected to continue to be a major focus in the partnership and foundation schools.

- Schools offered a wide variety of advisory activities and programs to address the emotional, social, and physical needs of students. However, a review of such programs showed little evidence of being

innovative or responsive. For example, innovative programs recommended in Caught in the Middle, such as cross-age and peer advising, were least likely to be offered.

- Some exemplary programs were offered for students at risk of dropping out and for their parents. Most programs were not specifically designed to meet the needs of this group of students, however, and would benefit from review, revision, and expansion. Programs for students underrepresented in college were more likely to have been recently developed and were specifically intended to prepare minority students for college.

- Linkages with other schools, businesses, community agencies, and universities were slow to be established. Schools were most likely to report continuing previously established linkages with law enforcement and social service agencies.

Technical Report 2

Regional processes, two years into the project

- All ten regions had established formal leadership structures usually consisting of the principal of the foundation school, an assistant, and as many as six additional individual leaders and six committees. These leadership structures were instrumental in carrying out specific tasks designed to assist schools in their efforts to implement reforms.

- Selected teachers and administrators within each region comprised a core steering committee. In each region this committee met regularly to plan strategy for regional reform activities, brainstorm solutions to common problems, and engage in what became referred to as risk-free sharing of ideas about middle grade reform.

- Several hundred teachers and administrators visited schools in their regions during steering committee meetings, thereby having a first-hand opportunity to observe implementation of successful reform programs.

- The more than 1,000 teachers and administrators who participated in staff development activities, were exposed to nationally renowned experts on middle grade reform and experienced local educators. Through regional and statewide conferences, educators were able to communicate with other middle-level educators from within and beyond their regions.

- Newsletters and/or directories published in all regions described successful school programs for middle-grade students and provided an effective resource for guiding prospective visitors to schools with programs that the visitors might like to observe.

- University faculty, particularly state university faculty, became integrally involved in the middle grade reform activities in nearly half the regions. This involvement is increasing and has contributed to serious reconsideration of training programs offered to middle-level educators in several state universities.

- Other (nonpartnership) schools serving the middle grades have been drawn into the reform effort. For example, in one region faculty in 80 additional schools have received the regional newsletter and have attended conferences and meetings sponsored by the regional network.

- In some regions excitement about middle grade reform has prompted discussions about how to continue with regional affiliations after the project has concluded.

The interim evaluation indicated that middle grade reform in California is well under way. After only six months of participation in the project, schools had taken the first steps toward implementing the recommendations in Caught in the Middle and expected their educational programs to improve considerably over the course of the three-year project. Further, the review of regional processes showed that schools were not acting in a vacuum. They were propelled and fortified by the networking and activities occurring within their regional networks. Communication channels included personal contacts at regional meetings, in-service training and conferences, and printed descriptions of successful programs in newsletters and directories. The growth of these networks built strong levels of intraregional commitment to school-level reform.

The degree to which the reform agenda improved the educational experience of middle grade students will be addressed in the final evaluation report. Clearly, the California agenda is up and running toward its goal of middle grade reform. The auspicious beginnings and high expectations of the schools and regions bode well for the success of the California reform agenda.

TECHNICAL REPORT 1: MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants

In the first year nearly 100,000 students were served in the 105 partnership and ten foundation schools. Schools ranged widely in terms of type (urban versus rural), total school enrollment, and ethnic enrollment. One region had extremely high percentages of black and Hispanic students. However,

comparisons between the total group of all participating schools (combined foundation and partnership schools) and schools statewide showed no noteworthy differences between regional network schools and other middle grade schools in the state. Participants constituted a fair representation of California's middle grade schools and students.

Comparisons were drawn between foundation schools and the partnership schools to identify school, staff, and student characteristics that might be associated with successful school reform because one selection criterion for foundation schools was their previous success in middle grade reform. Teaching staff in foundation schools were slightly older, had more years of experience, had higher levels of education, and had been with their school districts longer than staff in partnership schools. Students in foundation schools were more ethnically diverse and scored well above the state average on the California Assessment Program (CAP) tests in grades six and eight.

Areas of Reform

Only six months into the three-year project, some or all of the schools were implementing most of the major recommendations made in Caught in the Middle or were expected to do so in the near future. A review of accomplishments and suggestions for future work in seven major reform areas is provided as follows:

Core curricula. School principals reported that their curricula were currently well aligned with the California model curriculum guides (kindergarten through grade eight). Intention and effort to improve core curricula were reported by virtually all participants. In particular, most principals recognized a need and reported an intention to improve curricula in history-social science and the visual and performing arts. Another facet of the core curriculum needing strengthening was the number and type of exploratory courses offered to sixth grade students (short-term special-interest courses designed to broaden the learning experience).

Interdisciplinary teaming. Most schools (69 percent) had implemented interdisciplinary teams to some degree. The teams consisted of two or more teachers with differing subject area specializations sharing the same group of students. Further, the formation of teams tended to coincide with the publication of Caught in the Middle and the designation of the regional networks. Although most schools started teaming on a pilot level, all comments indicated that the schools intended to expand their current levels of interdisciplinary teaming to include additional grade levels and involve greater numbers of students. Unfortunately, most schools indicated that adopting a flexible master schedule to accommodate changing instructional needs at the school level was not being considered.

Advisory programs. The average amount of time students spent each week in advisory programs or activities exceeded the amount of time recommended in

Caught in the Middle. Further, the types of advisory programs and activities reported were, to a large degree, consistent with those recommended in the same publication. More than half the schools (60 percent) reported teacher-based advisor-advisee programs, a component of an advisory program strongly recommended in Caught in the Middle. Few schools, however, offered peer advising programs or cross-age tutoring, which Caught in the Middle also strongly recommends.

Programs for students at risk of dropping out. Nearly 80 percent of the schools reported programs to prevent students from dropping out. A review of program descriptions revealed, however, that few of the programs had been developed specifically for that purpose. Instead, schools apparently were using existing programs to meet the needs of at-risk students. And less than half of the schools (41 percent) reported activities or programs for parents of at-risk students.

Programs for students underrepresented in college. About half the schools had programs to prepare minority students for college. When such programs existed, they were specifically designed to meet the needs of these students.

Programs to detect and address health, social, and emotional problems in students. A majority of schools (82 percent) reported programs designed to detect health, social, and emotional problems, and to refer students to appropriate health and service agencies. A review of the types of programs offered, however, showed that few schools had gone beyond traditional vision and dental screening.

Linkages established with other schools, organizations, and businesses. By the end of the first six months of the project, schools had established linkages with a wide variety of organizations and businesses, and moderate satisfaction with the services provided by most organizations was reported by principals. Because satisfaction with social service agencies was low, an investigation of the reasons for the dissatisfaction was suggested. Linkages with other partnership schools and with their foundation school were least likely to have been established by schools. However, those schools that had established linkages with their foundation school and other partnership schools were more satisfied with the benefits of this linkage than with the benefits of any other linkage.

Recommendations for Schools

To maximize the success of the California agenda during years two and three of the project, it was recommended that foundation school and California Department of Education staff provide consultation, training, and linkages to help schools to:

- Improve the alignment of history-social science and Visual and Performing Arts curricula with the model curriculum guides and state curriculum frameworks.

- Make exploratory courses available to all students at the sixth grade level and to utilize the expertise of community members to increase the types of exploratory courses offered. At many schools the focus might have to be changed from elective to exploratory courses at the sixth grade level.

- Continue their efforts to implement or expand interdisciplinary teams on a schoolwide level.

- Consider options for flexible scheduling.

- Improve the content of their advisory programs, especially as to career development and post-secondary education.

- Adopt teacher-based advisor-advisee programs.

- Explore and implement innovative programs to detect a wide range of health, social, and emotional problems and to provide appropriate referrals.

- Develop or adopt programs <u>specifically</u> designed to (1) prevent students from dropping out; (2) improve the preparation for college education among students underrepresented in college; and (3) address the needs of parents of students at risk of dropping out.

- Implement peer-advising and cross-age tutoring programs.

- Share descriptions of successful programs with other schools.

- Determine the source of dissatisfaction with services provided by social service agencies to improve these services.

- Increase the overall use of services provided by community organizations and agencies, particularly those provided by offices of county superintendents of schools, colleges and universities, and foundation and partnership schools.

TECHNICAL REPORT 2: MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership Structures

Initially, the foundation school principal was designated by the California Department of Education as coordinator of regional activities. However, in all regions other individuals and committees worked in conjunction with the foundation school principal. Formal leadership structures were established midway through the first year, although the roles and tasks of these structures evolved over time as needed. The dynamics of leadership structures are described below.

Leadership provided by foundation school principals. The type of leadership provided by foundation school principals varied according to the school's historical involvement in middle grade reform and the leadership style of the principal. Effective leadership was provided by principals if the foundation school had already established its own middle grade reforms prior to implementation of this three-year effort and, therefore, was able to share successful experiences with the partnership schools in the region.

Foundation school principals all reported similar roles and responsibilities but differed in the manner in which they carried out their responsibilities. For example, some principals kept a close rein on regional activities while others involved large numbers of individuals by delegating tasks. Educators in regions where foundation school principals delegated tasks among partners in the regions evidenced a high degree of collegiality and camaraderie.

From year one to year two, staff turnover among principals occurred in four foundation schools and, in some regions, up to one-half of the partnership school principals. The disruption caused by staff turnover at the foundation school was minimized in regions where (1) the foundation school principal had involved partnership school principals in coordinating regional activities prior to leaving; (2) partnership principals elected their own leader to replace the departing foundation school principal; (3) the new foundation school principal had been highly involved in regional activities prior to being assigned to the position of foundation school principal; and (4) partnership principals had assumed a high degree of responsibility for regional functioning.

Leadership provided by individuals other than the foundation school principal. All regions had one primary individual assisting the foundation school principal. This staff or faculty person at the foundation school served a major role in coordinating regional activities. In addition, the number of other identifiable individual leaders ranged from two to 11 per region. These leaders included partnership school principals, teachers, and individuals from offices of county superintendents of schools, universities, or colleges who were responsible for a specific task, such as producing a newsletter or coordinating a conference. The roles and responsibilities of individual leaders varied considerably from region to region. In general, however, the greater the

diffusion of regional responsibilities among numerous individuals in the region, the more likely the region was to have accomplished more in terms of providing staff development, publishing newsletters and directories, and moving toward achieving regional goals.

Leadership provided by committees. A core steering committee which met on a regular basis and consisted of network principals was found in all but one region. This committee guided regional activities and provided an opportunity for principals to develop close intraregional relationships. Most regions held their meetings on a regular basis at different school sites. In most regions two to four teachers would accompany the principal to the meeting and go on a tour of the host school. The committee meetings were most efficient when the business meetings were extended to include staff development for visiting teachers as well. In this way both business and staff development functions occurred concurrently.

In addition to the core steering committee, each region had from two to six additional committees. Some of these committees were short-term and specific to a particular activity or event (e.g., a conference). Other committees were ongoing and related to regional objectives. These objective-specific committees were highly effective and contributed greatly toward accomplishments related to regional goals.

Regional Accomplishments

Staff development. Staff development was a major focus for all regions. Nearly all regions hosted an annual conference each year attended by as many as 500 participants. These conferences featured nationally known keynote speakers and small-group sessions presented primarily by network teachers, although college and university faculty, consultants in offices of county superintendents of schools, and community resource persons also participated. These conferences enabled schools to share their effective programs and practices.

Other sources of staff development included open enrollment for all schools in a region to attend each other's in-service training sessions. However, most teachers did not take advantage of this opportunity because the sessions were not publicized. Some regions hired professional trainers to provide regional inservices. Another avenue was to provide staff development in conjunction with regularly scheduled regional business meetings. Because this format proved effective, nearly all regions have now adopted the approach.

Communication among partnership schools. Newsletters, directories, and telecommunication networks were the major avenues of communication about middle grade reform. In the first year nearly all regions published newsletters which spotlighted successful programs in the region's schools and provided the name and phone number of a contact person. These newsletters were very informative and professional in appearance. Further, they were often distributed to all schools (not just partnership schools) with middle grade students in a region.

The publication of newsletters waned in year two as regions moved toward a more permanent desktop reference on successful programs through the publication of directories. The purpose of a directory was to provide a full description of successful reform programs in a region along with a reference for additional information. The directory could then be used to guide visitations to schools with programs of interest.

Telecommunications systems to facilitate mail and message communication among schools were established and functional in only two regions by the end of year two. Although there had been a high interest in establishing telecommunication systems early in the project, this interest waned in year two as the difficulties in establishing such a system became evident.

Linkages among schools and between schools and institutions of higher education, offices of county superintendents of schools, and other community resources. The major accomplishment in year one was establishing linkages among partners within each region through regional meetings and among foundation school principals through statewide meetings. In year two a number of successful linkages were established with faculty at universities, and substantial policy changes were made at several universities as a result. Student teachers were placed only in partnership schools in one region, and several state university campuses are currently setting up or considering setting up programs with specializations in middle level education. Thus, the link to colleges and universities has been and is expected to continue to be productive.

Linkages with offices of county superintendents of schools occurred in only a few regions. There were few examples of successful linkages with social or community agencies because regions and schools placed a lower priority on establishing such linkages.

Recommendations for Regions

Regional processes are important because they support, facilitate, and guide the reform efforts of schools. During the first two years of the project, each region adopted its own structure and focus, and each developed unique strengths. In most cases these strengths are reflected in the following recommendations. It is reasonable to expect that what worked well in one region may work well in another. Thus, it is recommended that foundation school and California Department of Education staff provide consultation, training, and linkages to help regions to:

- Select sites to coordinate regional activities based on the progress the schools have historically made in middle grade reform.

- Adopt a team approach to leadership and delegate responsibilities to other educators in the regions.

- Involve teachers and other nonadministrative personnel in leadership activities.

- Continue with existing committees or create committees to facilitate the implementation of regional objectives.

- Continue with or adopt a meeting format that includes a staff development component and visitations for teachers.

- Continue to offer an annual regional conference.

- Plan and implement long-term, intensive staff development.

- Continue to disseminate information about successful school programs through newsletters and directories.

- Establish school-level linkages with colleges and universities, and offices of county superintendents of schools, and other community agencies.

90-31 CR008940 9-90 100